

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 1668

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SUBJ: REPERCUSSIONS IN SRI LANKA OF EVENTS IN INDOCHINA

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1. SUMMARY: FALL OF REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM AND KHMER REPUBLIC IS UNLIKE TO HAVE SUBSTANTIAL IMPACT ON GSL FOREIGN POLICY OR ON GSL-US RELATIONS, BECAUSE SOUTHEAST ASIA IS PERIPHERAL TO SRI LANKA'S MOST VITAL INTERESTS DESPITE RHETORIC OF LEFTIST PARTIES, WHO HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY BEEN GIVEN PROPAGANDA BOOST. BASIC ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONCERNS ARE TIED TO CONTINUING REQUIREMENT FOR LARGE-SCALE ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE FROM ALL QUARTERS, WHICH IN TURN SERVES AS UNDERPINNING FOR

LONG-ESTABLISHED NON-ALIGNED POSTURE. VERBAL "FRATERNAL TIES" ARE LIKELY TO BE STRENGTHENED WITH NEW STATES IN INDOCHINA AND WITH THAILAND IF IT MOVES TO MORE NEUTRAL STANCE. EMERGENCE OF NEW REGIMES MAY HAVE SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON ACTIONS OF NON-ALIGNED GROUP AND, IN TURN, ON NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT SCHEDULED FOR COLOMBO IN AUG 1976. SRI LANKA'S CAREFUL DIPLOMATIC BALANCING ACT INVOLVING USSR, PRC, INDIA, AND UNITED STATES WILL GO ON. US PRESENCE IN SOUTH AND EAST ASIA WILL CONTINUE TO BE DESIRED, AS UNITED
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STATES WILL CONTINUE TO BE SEEN AS IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN SRI

LANKAS EFFORTS TO REMAIN FREE OF ANY ONE COUNTRY'S DOMINANT INFLUENCE. AT SAME TIME, LEFTIST ELEMENTS IN UNITED FRONT GOVERNMENT MAY OVER LONGER TERM BE ABLE TO EXPLOIT US SETBACKS IN INDOCHINA TO GAIN INCREASED INFLUENCE OVER GSL FOREIGN POLICY STANCE. AT THIS POINT, IT IS FAR TOO EARLY TO TELL. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESS PLAY AND POLITICIANS RHETORIC CONCERNING EVENTS IN INDOCHINA HAVE BEEN HEAVY AND LOUD, BUT IN ACTUALITY DISTANCE BETWEEN SRI LANKA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA AND LACK OF ANY SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC/TRADE LINKS MAKE IT AN AREA NOT OF DIRECT INTEREST TO GSL. COMMUNIST COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY IN ASIA, AND LEFTIST PARTIES IN SRI LANKA HAVE GAINED SOME PRESTIGE, BUT NOT PRACTICAL IMPACT, AT LEAST IN SHORT TERM, APPEARS LIMITED.

3. IMMEDIATE REACTION TO COMMUNIST VICTORIES IN INDOCHINA WAS WELL-ORCHESTRATED DEMONSTRATIONS OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR "PEOPLE'S VICTORY" AND NUMEROUS SPEECHES BY UNITED FRONT (UF) LEADERS CELEBRATING "SOCIALISM'S FORWARD MARCH." (PREDOMINANT MEMBER OF UF COALITION, PRIME MINISTER'S SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY, IS LEFT OF CENTER BUT NON-MARXIST; OTHER TWO MEMBERS, LANKA SAMAJA PARTY (TROTSKYITE) AND COMMUNIST PARTY/MOSCOW, ARE MARXIST AND WELL-DISCIPLINED AND PLAY DISPROPORTIONATE ROLE IN UNITED FRONT, PARTICULARLY THROUGH TIGHT-KNIT POLITICAL ORGANIZATION AND CONTROL OF STRONGEST LABOR UNIONS.) UF HAS BEEN COMMITTED TO CAUSE OF INDOCHINA "LIBERATION" SINCE FRONT WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1968, AND GSL RECOGNIZED PRG UPON TAKING POWER IN 1970. RECOGNITION OF SIHANOUK'S ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF

NATIONAL UNION CAME ONLY LAST MONTH, BUT SUPPORT FOR SIHANOUK IN BEFICIAL CIRCLES IS LONG-STANDING. SINCE INDOCHINA "LIBERATION" IS ONE ISSUE ON WHICH DISPARATE ELEMENTS OF UF CAN AGREE, IT WILL CONTINUE TO RECEIVE HEAVY EMPHASIS AT UF POLITICAL FUNCTIONS WHERE OTHER TOPICS EXCITE INTERNAL DIVISIONS. (HOWEVER, GENERAL PUBLIC RESPONSE HAS BEEN MUCH MORE SUBDUED, WITH MANY OBSERVERS INTERPRETING RECENT EVENTS AS PERHAPS INEVITABLE IN WAKE OF US WITHDRAWAL IN 1973.) WHILE COMMUNIST VICTORIES IN INDOCHINA HAVE GIVEN LEFTIST ELEMENTS A PROPAGANDA LIFT, THESE EVENTS WILL
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PROBABLY NOT IN NEAR TERM INCREASE LEFTISTS INFLUENCE ON GSL DOMESTIC POLICY, WHICH IS PRODUCT OF INTERNAL MOTIVATIONS, OR ITS CONDUCT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. OVER TIME, NEVERTHELESS, LEFTISTS MIGHT BE ABLE TO EXPLOIT OUR SETBACK IN SOUTHEAST ASIA TO IMPROVE THEIR INFLUENCE OVER GSL FOREIGN POLICY IN THEIR CONTINUING EFFORT TO REDUCE US PRESENCE HERE. EVENTS ARE TOO CLOSE, HOWEVER, FOR ANY VALID PREDICTION AT

THIS POINT.

4. WITH RESPECT TO USSR AND PRC, THEIR IMAGE HAS BEEN ENHANCED, BUT, AGAIN, WE AT PRESENT FORESEE NO FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE RESULTING FROM INDOCHINA DEVELOPMENTS IN GSL'S PERCEPTION OF ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THOSE TWO COUNTRIES. RECENT PRESS PLAY ON 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF V-E DAY HAS DEMONSTRATED SOVIET ABILITY TO EXERT HEAVY INFLUENCE ON MEDIA, BUT THAT IS NOT SYNONYMOUS WITH INCREASED SOVIET INFLUENCE ON GSL POLICIES. IN PAST GSL HAS TURNED DOWN INVITATION TO SUPPORT USSR'S ASIAN COLLECTIVE SECURITY PROPOSAL, AND MANY ELEMENTS IN GSL REMAIN SOMEWHAT SUSPICIOUS OF SOVIETS, ALTHOUGH RELATIONS ARE GOOD. THAT SUSPICION, PLUS USSR TIES WITH INDIA, ACTS AS MODERATING ELEMENT DESPITE LEFT-WING ADULATION OF SOVIET SYSTEM. IMAGE OF PRC HAS BENEFITED IN PAST FROM ECONOMIC TIES

BASED ON RICE-RUBBER AGREEMENT AND PRC ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, AS WELL AS SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP STEMMING FROM SRI LANKA'S VERY EARLY ESTABLISHMENT OF TRADE LINKS WITH PEKING. DURING PAST YEAR USSR PROPAGANDA EFFORT HAS OVERSHADOWED THAT OF PRC, AND DIVIDING LINE BETWEEN PRO-USSR AND PRO-PRC LEFTISTS HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT OBSCURED.

5. RE STATES OF THE AREA, SRI LANKA'S TIES WITH COMMUNIST REGIMES IN SOUTH VIET-NAM AND CAMBODIA WILL BE STRENGTHENED, BUT PROBABLY ONLY VERBALLY FOR SOME TIME TO COME. THERE IS NO TRADE WITH THEM NOW, BUT IF TRADING OPPORTUNITIES RARE TO DEVELOP WITH NEW REGIMES OVER TIME, WE COULD FACE PROBLEM OF SANCTIONS IN CONNECTION OUR ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO SRI LANKA.

6. EVENTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA MAY ALSO HAVE EFFECT OF
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STRENGTHENING ALREADY SATISFACTORY GSL RELATIONSHIP WITH THAILAND IF THAILAND PURSUES "MORE INDEPENDENT" POLICY. IN CONTEXT GSL SUPPORT FOR NEUTRALIZATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA, THAILAND WOULD BE PARTICULARLY WELCOME CONVERT, GIVEN COMMON CULTURAL TRADITION OF THERAVADA BUDDHISM AND ECONOMIC LINKS, ESPECIALLY THAILAND'S ROLE AS RICE SUPPLIER TO SRI LANKA FROM TIME TO TIME.

7. ONE AREA IN WHICH GSL MUST COPE IN SHORT TERM WITH ALTERED INDOCHINA REALITIES AND WHICH MAY IN TIME AFFECT ITS FOREIGN POLICY STANCE TO SOME LIMITED DEGREE IS EFFECT OF NEW REGIMES ON NON-ALIGNED GROUPING, AND IN TURN ON NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT SCHEDULED FOR COLOMBO IN AUGUST 1976. GSL WILL CERTAINLY SUPPORT SEATING TWO NEW REGIMES. (SIHANOUK EXPRESSED WISH TO ATTEND SUMMIT TO PRIME MINISTER'S

SON ANURA BANDARANAIKE IN PEKING IN MARCH.) RE PRG, GIVEN
GSL'S ACCEPTANCE OF IDEA OF NORTH KOREA'S PROBABLE
ACCESSION TO NON-ALIGNED GROUP, IT SHOULD HAVE NO PROBLEM
SWALLOWING SOUTH VIET-NAM, WHATEVER THE DEFECTS OF ITS
NEUTRALIST IMAGE. PRESENCE TWO NEW REGIMES AT
NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT WILL INCREASE INFLUENCE OF RADICAL
STATES IN THAT GROUPING AND WILL ADD TO SRI LANKA'S
DIFFICULTIES IN MAINTAINING MODERATE STANCE. IN THAT
SITUATION GSL WILL LIKELY FOLLOW MAJORITY ON POLITICAL
ISSUES BUT, IN LINE WITH PRIME MINISTER'S DESIRE
TO ACHIEVE REASONABLE AND CONCRETE RESULTS IN ECONOMIC FIELD,
WILL TRY TO RESIST MILITANT LEFTIST PRESSURES ON ECONOMIC
MATTERS OF IMPORTANCE TO SRI LANKA.

8. RE UNITED STATES, APART FROM VOCIFEROUS LEFTIST
PROPAGANDA ATTACKS THAT WILL INEVITABLY GO ON, WE CONSIDER
FUNDAMENTAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GSL WILL NOT BE SIGNIFICANTLY
ALTERED IN SHORT TERM. UNITED STATES CONTINUES TO PLAY
IMPORTANT ROLE IN GSL'S NEUTRALIST POLICY, BOTH BY ACTING
AS COUNTERWEIGHT TO USSR, PRC, AND INDIA AND AS SOURCE
OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. INDEED, IN CONTEXT CURRENT ECONOMIC
CALAMITIES, NEED OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE FROM ANY QUARTER
CLEARLY DOMINATES GSL'S FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES AND WILL
IN NEAR TERM OVERRIDE INFLUENCE OF EVENTS IN SOUTHEAST
ASIA. FURTHER, GSL, IN ITS DESIRE FOR A BALANCED WORLD,
MAY IN CONTEXT U.S. SETBACK IN INDOCHINA BE REINFORCED IN POSTURE
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RECEPTIVE TO CONTINUED AMERICAN PRESENCE HERE AND ELSEWHERE IN ASIA.
ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD DIEGO GARCIA MAY IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES
CONTINUE TO BE AMBIVALENT: CEYLONESE MAY THINK INDOCHINA
"LESSON" SHOULD ARGUE FOR ABANDONMENT OF U.S. PLANS FOR
DIEGO EXPANSION AND AT SAME TIME HOPE SOME TYPE OF U.S.
PRESENCE IN INDIAN OCEAN AREA WILL BE MAINTAINED
FOR REQUIRED BALANCE.

9. IN GENERAL WE SEE ENHANCEMENT OF COMMUNIST IMAGE AND NEW
PROPAGANDA VEHICLE FOR LEFTIST ELEMENTS BUT OTHERWISE
LITTLE DIRECT EFFECT OF SOUTHEAST ASIA ON SRI LANKA IN NEAR
FUTURE. WHAT LIES FARTHER AHEAD IN TERMS POSSIBLE
EXTENSION OF LEFTIST INFLUENCE AS RESULT INDOCHINA DEVELOPMENTS,
IT IS FAR TOO EARLY TO TELL. WE CONSIDER OVER-ALL STEPS
ALREADY UNDER WAY OR CONTEMPLATED TO MAINTAIN U.S. CREDIBILITY ARE
RELEVANT TO THIS COUNTRY, AS TO OTHERS.

VAN HOLLEN

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